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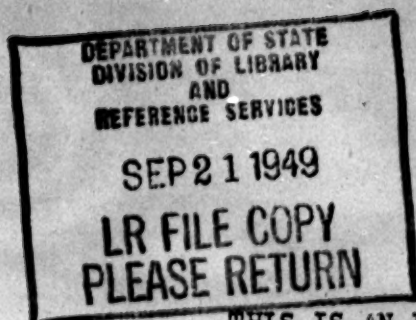
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POSTWAR DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INDIAN LABOR MOVEMENT

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SUMMARY

Three central labor organizations compete for membership in India. The All-India Trade-Union Congress (AITUC), established in 1921, after many vicissitudes has fallen into the hands of Communists. The Indian National Trade-Union Congress (INTUC), sponsored by the Indian National Congress, was set up in 1947 to counteract Communist influence in the labor movement and is now the largest labor organization with a membership of over one million. The Socialist Party of India in 1948 established its own central organization for labor, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS — Indian Labor Society), to increase and consolidate for political purposes Socialist influence in the working population.

Disunity has been a characteristic of the Indian trade-union movement throughout most of its history. Handicapped by poverty and illiteracy, Indian workers have not been able to take a leading role in trade-union organization and the movement from its inception has been under the control of political parties. On several occasions, political factionalism has resulted in disruption.

For a few months in 1946 and 1947, Indian labor under the AITUC presented a comparatively united front to industry and government, and prospects seemed favorable for the growth of a strong and stable trade-union movement with various political factions collaborating for the furtherance of labor's aims. Because this unity was achieved under the leadership of the Communist Party, the trade-union movement (with the great majority of organized laborers in the AITUC) became a threat to the stability of the government and to its economic program.

This anti-government tendency on the part of labor carried over from the period of British rule, when industry was closely associated with a foreign government and trade-union strikes for



increased wages and improved working conditions were an integral part of the nationalist movement. But the policy of increased production advocated by the new, independent Government of India calls for a tractable body of workers willing to subordinate their demands to national ends as defined by the government. The Indian National Congress, the party in power, had two alternatives: (1) to regain control of the AITUC, which it had lost during World War II, or (2) to form a new central labor body controlled by the Congress to challenge the AITUC and reduce its influence. Since the first of these alternatives appeared impossible within a reasonable period, the second was chosen and the INTUC was created. Adequate funds, competent organizers, and government support have already raised the membership of the INTUC to over a million.

No rival organization will be able to challenge the INTUC successfully while the Congress Party holds political power. The AITUC will tend to lose rather than gain power and may disappear altogether. Deprived of leadership, the rank and file of the AITUC, not sufficiently indoctrinated with Communism or strong enough to resist pressure, will gradually drift away to join the HMS or the INTUC. Despite the initial successes of the HMS, it is doubtful that inept Socialist leadership can continue for long to hold together the diverse labor groups that compose its membership. Should the HMS make any substantial gains in the labor field, the government might adopt a policy of appeasement and offer Jai Prakash Narayan, the Socialist leader, a place in the cabinet. Collaboration with the Congress at any level will weaken the HMS.

Trade-unionism in India has suffered and will continue to suffer from a surfeit of politics. As long as labor is organized primarily to serve political purposes, a strong and healthy trade-union movement will not develop. The chief prerequisite -- a literate, self-reliant body of workers, conscious of their common interests --



does not now exist.

Leaders of the INTUC do not envisage a trade-union organization of the Western type. Ideally, according to their views, the attitude of government and employers to the workers is paternalistic, and all collaborate for the benefit of society. Great emphasis is placed on welfare work as a union activity. It may be, as some leaders have predicted, that the INTUC will develop a new type of union suited to Indian economic conditions and social patterns.



I. THE SITUATION IN 1945<sup>1</sup>

During World War II industrial employment in India increased greatly. The number of factory workers rose from 1,751,137 in 1939 to 2,642,977 in 1945. Similar increases occurred in railways, mines, plantations, and other industries. Coincident with the rise in employment, there was a substantial growth of unionization. In 1939 the number of registered unions submitting returns was 667 with a total membership of 511,138; in 1945 the corresponding figures were 865 and 839,388.<sup>2</sup>

Unrest attributable to the rising cost of living in India (in some areas between 300 and 400 percent over the 1939 base) with no corresponding increase in earnings was aggravated in the war's end by prospects of retrenchment, coupled with labor's increasing awareness of its rights. Although both central labor organizations advocated support of the war effort, the number of industrial disputes rose from 406 in 1939 to 820 in 1945. Most of these were concerned with wages, bonuses, and treatment of personnel.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the war the two central labor organizations, the All-India Trade-Union Congress (AITUC) and the Indian Federation of Labor (IFL), were close competitors for the support of Indian labor. Each claimed about a half million members and both were recognized by the Government of India for purposes of representing Indian labor at international conferences. The IFL, however, was already discredited as a result of publicity of its wartime acceptance of a government subsidy, and the AITUC was on the verge of outstripping the rival organization in membership and prestige.

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1. For a brief discussion of the prewar period see Richard L. Park, "Labor and Politics in India", Far Eastern Survey, XVIII, No. 16, August 10, 1949.

2. Indian Labour Gazette (Delhi), July, 1947.

3. Ibid.



The Congress Party and the Socialists in 1945 were preparing to challenge Communist control over the AITUC as well as the extension of Communist influence to all fields of industrial labor.

## II. LABOR AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

### A. The Rise and Fall of the AITUC

The rise of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) after 1940, its steady increase in membership, power and prestige, reaching a peak in 1947, is attributable in large measure to Communist leadership. The subsequent decline of the organization also can be traced to the policy and tactics of the Communist Party of India.

During the war years the AITUC expanded its membership from less than 150,000 in 1940 to 474,099 in 1945, distributed in 413 unions.<sup>1</sup> In 1946 the AITUC challenged the right of the rival Indian Federation of Labor to represent Indian labor at international conferences. As the result of an inquiry held at government request, the AITUC was declared to have a membership of 696,555 and was thereafter recognized as the most representative labor organization.<sup>2</sup> Figures available for the ensuing period indicate a steady growth to a membership of 796,194 in 601 unions in February 1947.<sup>3</sup>

Cotton textile unions formed the largest industrial group in the AITUC, with 195,532 members in 99 unions; 22 railway unions had 136,470 members, more than half of the total being concentrated in Madras and Bombay; transport workers (other than railway and shipping) counted 52,604 members, of whom 26,075 were from Bengal. The geographic distribution of the AITUC membership reflects not only the degree of industrialization in various sections of the country but also corresponds closely to the areas of Communist concentration.

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1. Trade Union Record (Bombay), August, 1945.

2. Peoples Age (Bombay), September 22, 1946.

3. Report of the Annual Session of the AITUC (Calcutta), 1947.



Seventy percent of the total membership of the AITUC were in Bengal, (247,213), in Bombay (158,066), and in Madras (155,697).<sup>1</sup>

The proportion of Communists in the top leadership of the AITUC increased with the growth of the organization. In early 1945, only thirty-two of seventy-two members of the general council were Communists,<sup>2</sup> but no fewer than forty-two of fifty-six members of the general council which met in Delhi in November 1946 were Communists.<sup>3</sup> Of twelve officials elected at the February 1947 session of the AITUC, five were Communists: the president (S.A. Dange), two vice-presidents, (S.S. Mirajkar, and S.S. Yusuf), and two assistant secretaries (Shanta Mukherji and Manek Gandhi). Communists held nine of twenty-one memberships in the working committee in 1945 and thirteen of twenty in 1947.

The success of the Communists in gaining control of the AITUC can be attributed in the first place to the imprisonment during the war of Congress and Socialist labor leaders who had played a major role in building up the AITUC. Others -- including M.N. Roy and independents such as Aftab Ali, head of the Indian Seamen's Union -- had left the AITUC. Communists constituted the only remaining experienced and well-organized group and, while building up the AITUC, they managed also to increase their own strength in it. Another factor was the discrediting of the government-subsidized Indian Federation of Labor; some of its most important leftist unions rejoined the AITUC and afforded support to the Communists. Widespread unrest among the laboring population, attributable to general economic conditions, provided a promising field for militant Communist activities.

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1. In the United Provinces, where Socialist influence is strong, only 49 unions with a total strength of 47,656 were affiliated to the AITUC and of these probably less than one out of four were Communist.

2. Amrita Bazaar Patrika (Calcutta), February 7, 1945.

3. D-939, New Delhi, February 5, 1947.



The establishment of Communist control over the AITUC inevitably brought that organization under attack by Congress Party and Socialist political leaders. Whereas previously the AITUC had been an organization representing all shades of political opinion, with leaders collaborating to achieve labor's aims, it had become a Communist organization tied by policy and personnel to the Communist Party.

Defections began in the fall of 1947. When the general council of the AITUC met in Bombay in September 1947, six unions with a total membership of 17,225 applied for disaffiliation.<sup>1</sup> By March 1948, 36 unions with a membership of 71,887 had left the AITUC.<sup>2</sup> The principal rival was the government-sponsored Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). The AITUC lost its status as most representative organization of Indian labor later in 1948 when a government inquiry, conducted at the request of the INTUC, showed that the AITUC had 862,216 members as compared with 968,940 members in the INTUC. The AITUC protested the results of the inquiry and requested an impartial investigation by a High Court judge or panel of judges; the government refused on the grounds that it would be difficult to find the necessary complement of judges and that insufficient time was available before the convening of the ILO session which the INTUC delegates were scheduled to attend.

It will be noted that the figure 862,216 declared by the government to be the membership of the AITUC shows a considerable increase over the previous year. This growth in the face of opposition from the INTUC can be interpreted as evidence of Communist strength among the laboring population and of increased dissatisfaction with government measures to satisfy workers' demands.

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1. The figure given here corresponds to the combined figures for these unions as stated in the 1947 report of the AITUC, Peoples Age (Bombay), September 14, 1947.

2. Trade Union Record (Bombay), March, 1948.



INTUC membership appears to have been recruited largely from previously unorganized workers.

Although the AITUC remained strong in spite of early defections, dissatisfaction with Communist leadership led directly to the resignation in October 1948 of the general secretary, N.M. Joshi, a non-Communist highly respected for his long and disinterested service to the cause of Indian labor. Joshi resigned because he was unwilling to accept the Communist delegate chosen by the AITUC textile unions to represent Indian labor on the ILO Industrial Committee on Textiles. Apparently anxious to preserve the unity of the trade union movement at any cost, Joshi had previously defended against all criticism the policies of the AITUC and the Communists in the organization. When the INTUC was organized he refuted charges made by its founders that the AITUC admitted paper unions, was opposed to arbitration in labor disputes, and was controlled by Communists. Concerning this last point he stated that, although Communists formed a majority in the organization, all decisions and resolutions of the AITUC were unanimous.<sup>1</sup> Joshi later associated himself as general secretary with protests made by the AITUC against the government declaration that the INTUC was the most representative labor organization.

Information as to the numerical strength of the trade unions controlled by Joshi is not available. At the 1947 session of the AITUC he was a delegate from the Seamen's Union of Bombay, with a membership of only 3,000. It is probable therefore that the membership figure of the AITUC was not seriously affected by Joshi's resignation. But the organization lost heavily in prestige. With his departure the Communists gave up attempts at compromise and Manek Gandhi, a prominent Communist labor leader in Bombay, was

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1. Peoples Age (Bombay), May 11, 1947.



made acting general secretary.

Following Joshi, the remaining non-Communist leaders of the AITUC resigned in a short time. These defections afforded more support for the government's anti-AITUC campaign and the cumulative effect on the AITUC was serious.<sup>1</sup>

The prospects of the AITUC are not bright. The government's policy of repressing individual Communist trade-union leaders has become increasingly severe. Almost all Communist labor leaders are in jail or have gone underground to escape arrest even though the party itself remains technically legal. Under these circumstances, the AITUC will probably not be able to hold its member unions in the face of competition from the INTUC and the Socialist labor organization.

Communists may strike back by attempting to infiltrate the INTUC. It is significant that at least two unions affiliated to that organization appear to contain strong Communist elements. The president of the All-Bengal Press-Workers' Union, for example, is Mrs. Bina Das, a member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly and treasurer of the Bengal branch of the INTUC.<sup>2</sup> She is reported to be a "follower of the Communist Party line," but not a party member. The Bata Mazdoor Union is another group which left the AITUC to join the INTUC. Most of the workers in this union are said to be Communists. One Communist leader, Snehasu Acharya, was only recently expelled from the party. These reports and facts, meager though they are, suggest that infiltration has already begun.

B. Communists and the All-India Railwaymen's Federation

The All-India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF) since its

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1. According to report of The Statesman, Calcutta, March 28, 1949 the AITUC had a total membership in March 1949 of 679,143 in 734 unions. Its strength, as in 1947 (cf. p.4) was still greatest in Bengal (205,817 members), Madras (146,665 members) and Bombay (128,050 members).

2. Amrita Bazaar Patrika (Calcutta), June 7, 1948.



foundation in 1922 has remained more or less apart from other central trade union organizations, although individual unions were affiliated to the AITUC or the Indian Federation of Labor. Until recently the AIRF was under the control of right-wing labor leaders, such as Jamnadas Mehta and V.V. Giri. However, several large railway unions affiliated with the AIRF have been dominated by Communists for many years,<sup>1</sup> and the Communists have succeeded in influencing its policy from time to time.

The railway crisis of 1949 was the culmination of a long struggle between the AIRF and the government Railway Board, beginning in 1945. The principal matters at issue throughout concerned retrenchment, dearness (cost-of-living) allowance, and grain-shop facilities which enabled railway workers to buy at reduced rates. The Railway Board contended that acceptance of the railwaymen's demands was financially impossible and would lead to increased inflation; and that the railway workers were already in a favorable position as compared with those in other industries. Strike threats by the AIRF in 1946 and again in 1947 won small concessions for the railwaymen.

During this period the Communists, who were in a minority on the AIRF general council, obtained support from time to time for a militant policy, and on several occasions Communist-dominated unions instituted independent strikes. On the whole, however, the more moderate method of negotiation won majority approval. Socialist Jai Prakash Narayan, elected president of the AIRF in 1947, was

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1. These include the South India Railway Labour Union, which increased its membership, under Communist leadership, from 7,000 in August 1942 (People's War, Bombay, July 18, 1943) to 24,049 in 1947, the Bengal Assam Railway Workers' Union (16,358), the Bombay Baroda & Central Indian Railwaymen's Union (12,000), and the Great Indian Peninsula Railwaymen's Union (15,226). See Report of 1947 Session of the AITUC.



opposed to strikes on the grounds that the new government should be given opportunity to improve the general economic situation, and that internal difficulties would hinder the government in solving the Hyderabad and Kashmir problems.

In August 1948, at the Lillooah convention of the AIRF, the proponents of negotiation again defeated the Communist resolution to hold a strike ballot unless demands for a basic wage of Rs. 72 (as compared with the Rs. 30 then in force) and full compensation for the rise in the cost of living were granted by October 31, 1948. The resolution finally passed directed the general council "to review the demand for full compensation in cost of living" if it had not been granted by the time of the next council meeting. The convention also decided that the council would meet in November 1948 "to take stock before coming to a decision on the necessity or otherwise of striking".<sup>1</sup> Jai Prakash Narayan advised that a strike would be disastrous and warned the railwaymen against becoming party to the disruptive tactics of the Communists.

Shortly after the Lillooah convention the Railway Board announced its decision to end grain-shop facilities and to give no compensatory increase in dearness allowance. At the general council meeting at Nagpur in November 1948, Jai Prakash Narayan advised the members that the time for action had come. He charged that the government had ignored the demands made by the AIRF, had actually reduced dearness allowances, and had "attempted to suppress trade union activities by detention of union workers without trial and by indiscriminate discharge of railway workers." He accused the government of "trying to by-pass the Federation and ultimately destroy it." He declared that improvement in the general situation in the country, with the Hyderabad issue settled and tension between India and

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1. Janata (New Delhi), September 12, 1948.



Pakistan over Kashmir greatly reduced, made it "no longer necessary for labor or any other section of the people to hold in abeyance its struggle for a better life."<sup>1</sup> The Council decided accordingly to take a strike ballot by January 20, 1949.

The member unions voted to strike. Nevertheless, after extended negotiations between Jai Prakash Narayan and the Railway Board, the working committee of the AIRE met in Delhi and decided to reconsider the Nagpur decision in view of concessions made by the board. Communist members of the committee opposed this move but were defeated sixteen to six. By a majority vote another meeting of the general council was called at Dinapore on February 16.<sup>2</sup>

Before the Dinapore meeting took place, the Communists decided to take independent action. Representatives of the East India Railway Workers' Union and the Assam Railroad Workers' Union called a conference of Communist railway unions at Calcutta, February 12, "to decide on the form of action to implement the workers' verdict for strike."<sup>3</sup> The conference was attended by 275 delegates; the unions they represented were as follows:

East India Railway Workers' Union  
Assam Railroad Workers' Union  
South India Railway Labor Union  
Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railwaymen's  
Union  
East Punjab Railway Workers' Union  
Oudh and Tirhut Railway Workers' Union  
Bengal Nagpur Railway Central Council of Action  
Madras and Southern Mahratta Railway Workers'  
Union (Andhra Branch)

The principal resolution appealed to all railway workers to strike on March 9.<sup>4</sup>

When the AIRE general council met at Dinapore a few days later, on February 16, the majority voted to stay action on the

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1. Janata (New Delhi), December 5, 1948.
  2. Peoples Age (Bombay), February 6, 1949.
  3. Ibid., February 13, 1949.
  4. Ibid., February 20, 1949.



strike ballot in view of concessions made by the Railway Board. As disciplinary action the following Communist unions were disaffiliated from the AIRF:<sup>1</sup>

East India Railroad Workers' Union  
Assam Railroad Workers' Union  
South India Railway Labor Union  
Great Indian Peninsula Railwaymen's Union  
Bombay, Baroda and Central India Railway-  
men's Union<sup>2</sup>

The government took prompt action to prevent the strike called by Communist unions; in a country-wide drive against Communist railway leaders, most of them were arrested and jailed.

Thus Communist political maneuvering in trade-unions and persistent direct action in opposition to the nationalist government have brought about the disruption of both the AITUC and the AIRF and the virtual isolation of Communist-led organizations from the main trade-union movement in India. The result is that Communists henceforth will enjoy diminished opportunity to exercise effective leadership among the Indian laboring population.<sup>3</sup>

### III. THE FORMATION AND GROWTH OF THE INTUC

The formation of the India National Trade-Union Congress (INTUC) in May 1947 was calculated to furnish the Government of India with a stable and tractable body of organized labor which would permit the National Congress Party to carry out its program of increased production.

Before the INTUC was set up, Congress Party efforts in the labor field since 1944 had been concentrated on regaining control over the All-India Trade-Union Congress (AITUC). Members of the party had been active participants in the trade-union movement throughout its

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1. Peoples Age (Bombay), February 20, 1949.

2. Since this union did not participate in the Calcutta Conference, it is not clear why it was disaffiliated along with the others.

3. A-3963, Madras, March 9, 1949. UNCLASSIFIED.



history and had played an important role in building up the AITUC. In spite of the fact that during the war leadership of the AITUC had passed into other, chiefly Communist, hands, the Congress Party anticipated no great difficulty in regaining control over organized labor.

With this in mind, the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh, Worker's Aid Society, was resuscitated in April 1945 as a first step. The Sangh was originally established by a group of Congress leaders in 1938 with the primary function of making available to the labor movement "trained workers with correct understanding of the needs and conditions of labor and practical knowledge of the appropriate means and methods of promoting its best interests".<sup>1</sup> Sardar Patel was the first president and members of the working committee -- including Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Kripalani, Shankerrao Deo, and Jairamdas Daulatram -- were drawn from the inner circle of the National Congress.<sup>2</sup> By 1942, thirty-four workers had been trained to carry out the Sangh's program. But as a consequence of the "Quit India" resolution members and workers of the Sangh along with most other prominent members of the Congress Party were jailed in August 1942, and this temporarily put a stop to the Sangh's activity.

In 1945 the Sangh adopted a program drawn up by Gulzarilal Nanda, Minister for Labor in the Bombay cabinet and known for his work in the Textile Labor Association in Ahmedabad. As before, the emphasis was placed on training specialists who would devote themselves to the labor field. Only members of the Congress Party were to be accepted as members and these had to take a pledge not to associate with any party "which countenances the use of violent means or aims at the establishment of dictatorial or general control of the political or economic

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1. Bombay Chronicle, April 12, 1945.  
2. D-29, Bombay, April 27, 1945.



life of the people".<sup>1</sup> No attempt was made to set up a central organization of labor with affiliated unions as constituents; the Sangh was to function as a central body in an advisory capacity only, and each member was free to join either the AITUC or the Indian Federation of Labor. In November 1946, after the AITUC had been declared the most representative labor organization in India, the HMSS passed a resolution recommending affiliation with the AITUC.

Meanwhile, industrial relations were deteriorating, and the necessity from the Congress point of view of counteracting Communist influence in the labor movement became increasingly urgent. It was obvious that labor under Communist leadership could not be relied upon to cooperate with government and industry even with a national government in office. Moreover, the labor movement offered a fertile field for the furtherance of Communist political aims. Rather than continue efforts to seize control of the AITUC, which might take some time, Congress labor leaders decided to set up a rival organization. By isolating Communist-led unions a Congress government could more easily deal effectively with Communist labor leaders when necessity arose.

In May 1947 the Sangh called a convention of labor leaders and prominent members of the Congress Party, including members of the interim government. Among those present were Prime Minister Nehru, Sardar Patel, and Jagjivan Ram. The conference criticized the "course which the labor movement in the country is taking under the leadership of those who are opposed to peaceful change and democratic methods" and accepted as a "sacred and imperative obligation ... the necessity of taking concerted action to safeguard and promote the interests of labor." Accordingly, the conference decided to form a new central labor organization to be known as the Indian National

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1. D-29, Bombay, April 27, 1945.



## Trade-Union Congress (INTUC).

The draft constitution of the INTUC listed as objectives: "(1) progressive elimination of social, political, and economic exploitation and inequality, and the subordination of the profit motive to social ends, (2) placing industry under national ownership and control in suitable form, (3) full employment and increasing association of the workers in the administration of industry, (4) speedy improvement of working conditions and provision of social security benefits, (5) a living wage for every worker with suitable regulation of working hours, (6) justice in industrial relations, (7) redress of grievances, wherever possible without stoppage of work, through negotiation, conciliation, arbitration or adjudication and, where such measures are not effective, by recourse to other legitimate methods including strikes, and improvement of workers' standard of efficiency and discipline."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most important clauses in the INTUC constitution binds the unions to a definite policy of arbitration in the settlement of industrial disputes: "Every affiliated organization shall offer to submit to arbitration every industrial dispute in which a settlement is not reached by negotiation and shall not sanction or support a strike unless avenues of a settlement have been exhausted and a majority of its members vote by ballot in favor of strike".<sup>2</sup>

The growth of the INTUC during the two years of its existence has been phenomenal. From 157,000 members in June 1947, the organization had expanded by November 1947 to include 149 unions with a total membership of 324,088.<sup>3</sup> In June 1948, the INTUC had a member-

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1. Hindustan Times (New Delhi), May 5, 1947.

2. Ibid.

3. Indian Labour Journal (New Delhi), November 14, 1947. By far the largest number (93) of member unions were in Bengal; the position of the INTUC in Bombay city, where Communists have had a numerous and loyal following, was much less strong. Analysis by industries indicated that coal mines and railways were poorly represented.



ship of 968,940.<sup>1</sup> The most recent report, issued in May 1949, placed the membership at 1,180,000.

In order more efficiently to control the member unions a number of federations representing industries were set up: the National Textile Workers' Federation, the Indian National Plantation Workers' Federation, and the Indian National Railway Workers' Federation (INRWF).<sup>2</sup>

The INRWF is potentially a very important organization, clearly designed to rival and if necessary supplant the All-India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF). At the first meeting of the general council of the INRWF held in Bombay, November 1948, Dr. Suresh Chandra Banerjee, the president, criticized the older organization for harboring unions controlled by Communists, Socialists, and other anti-Congress political groups who were guided not by the welfare of the laborers but by their own aspirations to oust the present Congress government by violent means and to establish in its place a government controlled by the successful party.<sup>3</sup> One of the first branches of the INRWF, the United South Indian Railwaymen's Federation, was formed in June 1947<sup>4</sup> to counteract the influence of the powerful, Communist-controlled South India Railway Labor Union.

So far, the government has not recognized the INRWF and has continued negotiations with the AIRF. Recent events, however, have split the AIRF,<sup>5</sup> and the INRWF may succeed before long in winning government recognition. In South India the United South Indian Railwaymen's Federation has already done so, at the expense of the South India Railway Labor Union. The government will probably hesitate to withdraw recognition from the AIRF in favor of a Congress-sponsored rival as long as the AIRF stops short of drastic action to win its

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1. Peoples Age (Bombay), June 20, 1948.
  2. D-328, (Bombay), May 26, 1948, UNCLASSIFIED.
  3. Amrita Bazaar Patrika, (Calcutta), November 29, 1948.
  4. Indian Labour Journal, (New Delhi), September 16, 1947.
  5. See page 10.



demands.

The rapid growth of the INTUC has been due only in part to accretions at the expense of the AITUC and the present Socialist central labor organization, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha. Only a few important unions from the AITUC are known to have joined the INTUC and Hariharnath Shastri is the only prominent Socialist labor leader who has gone over to the INTUC. Formerly a member of the AITUC exercising control over the United Provinces branch of that organization, Shastri resigned from the Socialist Party to join the INTUC when it was first set up, and became its president in May 1948. The facts point to the conclusion that the INTUC has drawn the majority of its members from the large mass of previously unorganized labor.

The INTUC entered the labor field with several advantages over its rivals. It was well equipped with funds. The total income of the AITUC for 1946 was Rs. 19,270; and the Bengal branch alone of the INTUC reported an income for 1947-48 of Rs. 18,502. The Congress press has consistently supported the INTUC. The INTUC brings out a fortnightly publication, the Indian Labour Journal, but the AITUC has only a small monthly organ, the Trade Union Record. The INTUC has also the prestige of the National Congress behind it, and can expect the support of industrialists, most of whom are members of the Congress Party.

Industrial relations have improved since the INTUC was formed; the number of industrial disputes in Bombay Province has decreased from 640 in 1947, with a total loss of 3,783,817 days, to 536 in 1948, with a loss of 1,810,793 days.<sup>1</sup> These figures are typical of the country as a whole. The government has detained Communist labor leaders in substantial numbers, and the Socialists on the whole have thrown their weight on the side of industrial peace. Nevertheless, the INTUC itself deserves considerable credit for championing the

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1. A-186, Bombay, March 18, 1949, UNCLASSIFIED.



idea of subordinating union interests to those of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the INTUC leaders are loyal, long-time members of the Congress Party, many of them with considerable experience in the Indian labor movement. Among them are orthodox Gandhi-men who have been associated with the Hindustan Mazdoor Sevak Sangh and the Ahmedabad Textile Labor Association sponsored by Gandhi; one of these is Khandubhai Desai, for many years secretary of the Textile Labor Association and recently elected president of the INTUC (May 1949). Others<sup>2</sup> were prominent leaders in the old AITUC during the 1930's who on the whole took a position somewhat left of center according to alignments at the time. A number of the leaders are members of provincial legislative assemblies and two, Niharendu Dutt-Mazumdar and Gulzarilal Nanda, hold ministerial office in Bengal and Bombay respectively.

Since the INTUC was set up primarily to insure that organized<sup>3</sup> labor not oppose the government labor policy of industrial truce wherever possible and compulsory arbitration if necessary, a militant program is not to be expected. The Ahmedabad Textile Labor Association, considered by Congress members to represent a model Indian labor union, will no doubt set the pattern for the principal activities of the INTUC. Although the Textile Labor Association has supported strikes from time to time, joint conciliation and arbitration with the Ahmedabad Mill-owners' Association has been the rule and the city has been relatively free of industrial disputes. Social welfare work is a chief activity

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1. The INTUC policy of settlement by negotiation parallels that of the Government, which is set forth in Act number XIV which provides for handling industrial disputes by conciliatory inquiry, or adjudication. The operation of the agencies established under this act is not considered in this paper. Cf. Richard L. Park, "Labor and Politics in India", Far Eastern Survey, August 10, 1949.

2. Suresh Chandra Bannerjee, Suraj Prasad Avasthi, Phani Ghose, and Deven Sen.

3. D-326, (Bombay), May 25, 1948, RESTRICTED.



of the Union. In 1939-40, out of a total income of Rs. 62,224, Rs. 43,000 was assigned to educational, social, and religious benefits, probably more than all other Indian labor unions together expended for such purposes.<sup>1</sup>

It is along such lines, rather than those of traditional, orthodox trade unionism, that the INTUC can be expected to develop.

#### IV. THE SOCIALIST BID FOR LEADERSHIP

The first independent central labor organization set up by the Socialists was the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat. (HMP -- Indian Labor Council). The inauguration of the HMP in March 1948 coincided with the Socialists' decision to break with the Indian National Congress of which they had formed an integral part since 1934. Socialist-dominated trade-unions previously affiliated to the All-India Trade-Union Congress (AITUC) had withdrawn from that organization following the inauguration of the Indian National Trade-Union Congress (INTUC) by the Congress Party in May 1947, and the consequent weakening of non-Communist forces in the AITUC. Criticizing the INTUC on the grounds that a division of "revolutionary labor power" at that time was harmful, and that it was based on the principle of class collaboration,<sup>2</sup> the Socialists set up a labor bureau to coordinate activities of the Socialist labor unions.<sup>3</sup>

The stated basic objectives of the HMP were four in number:

(1) to coordinate and assist the work of affiliated unions with respect to employment rights and workers' economic interests generally; (2) to foster federations of unions and nation-wide organization of worker groups by industries; (3) to champion the workers' right to strike and to freedom of association, speech, and press; (4) to promote the

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1. Mukerjee, R., *The Indian Working Class*, (Bombay), 1948, p. 340.

2. *Statesman*, (Delhi), May 28, 1947.

3. D-189, Bombay, May 15, 1947, RESTRICTED.



political interests of the workers looking toward the establishment of a democratic Socialist state.<sup>1</sup>

The final political objective mentioned above deserves special notice. Taking the British Labor Party as the model, the Socialists have set themselves the task of organizing a mass political party in which labor unions are to play an important role. The advantages to be gained by close association with organized labor were set forth as follows by Jai Prakash Narayan in a statement on the structure of the party: first, it "links the political party with the class organizations of the masses"; second, "it makes possible a rapid growth and development of the party"; third, "the attachment of individual members to the Party, especially when enrolled in the mass, will not be so deep as when their unions or panchayats [organizations] are affiliated to the party." Summing up Socialist views of the relationship between labor unions and the party, Jai Prakash Narayan writes: "The working class has a dual role to play: economic and political. A trade-union cannot merely be satisfied with collective bargaining [through the HMP], it must also attempt to influence legislation and government through the SP".<sup>2</sup>

The assertion of Socialist leaders at the time the FMP was established that 513,000 workers in 761 unions were "functioning under the Party's aegis"<sup>3</sup> is hardly credible, even if the figures include the entire membership of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation of which Jai Prakash Narayan had been made president. An Indian Federation of Labor estimate of December 1947, probably prejudiced against the Socialists, showed 50,000<sup>4</sup> in Socialist-

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1. Janata. (New Delhi), March 28, 1948.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. D-445, New Delhi, December 23, 1947, RESTRICTED.



controlled unions. Six months later Jai Prakash Narayan gave 300,000 as the total membership of Socialist-controlled unions.<sup>1</sup> When the HMP was organized its membership was probably between 100,000 and 200,000.

Dissatisfaction on the part of some non-Socialist labor leaders with the policies of the Communist-dominated AITUC and their resignation from that body presented the Socialists with new opportunities. In November 1948, Jai Prakash Narayan called a conference in Bombay of non-Communist and non-Congress labor leaders, presided over by N.M. Joshi who until the previous month had been general secretary of the AITUC. Among those present were other ex-leaders of the AITUC: R.A. Khedgikar, M.V. Phadke, Dinkar Desai. In addition to the Socialists, members of several other leftist political groups were present: R.S. Ruikar, a prominent member of the Forward Bloc, Maniben Kara of the Radical Democratic Party, and Antony Pillai, president of the Bolshevik - Leninist Party of India which had recently decided to dissolve and join the Socialist Party.<sup>2</sup> Discussion centered around inflation, dearness allowances, and industrial relations with particular reference to the government's labor policy. General unanimity of opinion on these issues was reported.

The most important outcome of this conference and perhaps its chief purpose was the decision to set up a new central labor organization. Again the Socialists took the lead. At a second conference which met in Calcutta, December 24-26, 1948, a program was adopted, an organizing committee set up, and the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) came into being. The conference was attended by over 600 delegates representing 427 trade-unions with a membership of 606,472.<sup>3</sup>

The manifesto, drawn up by Asoka Mehta, a prominent Socialist, states that, "the emancipation of the working class can be

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1. D-777, New Delhi, July 7, 1948, CONFIDENTIAL.

2. Times of India, (Bombay), November 25, 1948.

3. Janata, (New Delhi), January 2, 1949.



achieved only through labor's assumption of authority in the state" and "the new central organization will further all efforts at the political organization of the working people".<sup>1</sup> Among the immediate objectives of the HMS are: a living wage; a guarantee of the right to work; social security measures; provision for housing; recognition of the right of collective bargaining; repeal of all legislation encroaching upon the fundamental rights of labor, principally the right to strike; and nationalization of key industries and banks.<sup>2</sup>

The officers of the HMS and the members of the working-committee are drawn for the most part from the Socialist Party, the Radical Democratic Party and the Forward Bloc, but a few of its leaders, such as Dinkar Desai and N.V. Phadke, have not been closely associated with any political party. The president, R.S. Ruikar, is a member of the Forward Bloc, and the general secretary, Asoka Mehta, a Socialist. Prominent members from the Radical Democratic Party include Maniben Kara, a vice-president of the new organization, V.P. Karnik, Rajani Mukherjee, A.M. Williams. All are experienced labor leaders, previously connected with the Indian Federation of Labor and the Hind Mazdoor Panchayat, both of which were absorbed in the new organization, or the AITUC.

So far the Socialists have met with considerable success in carrying out their program. The Indian Federation of Labor, though its former membership has been reduced by more than half, has probably contributed between 100,000 and 200,000 members<sup>3</sup> and a number of competent leaders to the new organization. In terms of numbers, the accessions from the AITUC and from the Bolshevik-Leninist Party are matters for conjecture, but such men as Ruikar,

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1. Janata, (New Delhi), January 2, 1949.

2. Ibid.

3. According to Indian Labor, (Delhi), the organ of the Indian Federation of Labor, the membership in January 1948 was 232,293.



who controls textile workers in the Central Provinces, Khedgikar, and Desai are assets to any labor group. The Socialists have also undoubtedly gained some strength as a political party: the old Radical Democratic Party which organized and controlled the Indian Federation of Labor is now defunct as a political organization, and its members may be expected to support the Socialists; likewise the Forward Bloc, already weakened by dissensions, may eventually merge with the Socialist Party. It is significant that N.M. Joshi, without doubt the most generally respected trade-union promoter in India, has refused to take part in the Hind Mazdoor Sabha because of its political emphasis.

It is too early to prophesy concerning the success of the HMS. The INTUC is a powerful rival; the AITUC still appeals to the more radical section of labor and is willing to run risks that the Socialist leaders dare not take. One thing is certain: As long as labor organizations are conceived and used as adjuncts to political groups, the HMS will rise or fall with the Socialist Party. It is problematical whether the Socialists can long continue to hold together the diverse leftist groups, each jealous of its own identity, which make up the HMS. Not all who attended the Calcutta conference were willing to accept Socialist leadership. Mrinal Kanti Bose, a former president of the AITUC, (1945-47), and a few others, including Soumyendranath Tagore, and Sudhir Pramanik, walked out of the conference because the Socialists refused to accept as an objective of the new organization the establishment of a Socialist society or to regard trade unions as organs of class struggle.<sup>1</sup>

An example of the tendency toward fragmentation is the setting up the United Labor Conference by this dissident group. The conference consisted allegedly of fifty trade-union representatives,

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1. Peoples Age, (Bombay), January 2, 1949.



which in turn, at a meeting in Calcutta in May 1949, formed a new central labor organization, the United Trade-Union Congress.

K.T. Shah, member of the Constituent Assembly, was elected president and Mrinal Kanti Bose, general secretary.<sup>1</sup> It is not likely that this organization will offer serious competition to the Hind Mazdoor Sabha.

The Socialist Party, chiefly through Jai Prakash Narayan, is influential in the All-India Railwaymen's Association (see p. 7) and the All-India Postmen and Lower Grade Staff Union, one of the most militant unions in this field. Narayan is president of both organizations. As previously pointed out, Narayan has preferred to avoid strikes, even when voted by a majority of these unions, preferring to accept government concessions short of the workers' demands. Socialists will probably be as militant as is necessary to win and retain labor's support, while endeavoring to avoid following Communist leadership and incurring the hostility of either government or industry.

#### V. INTERNATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS

India has been a member of the ILO since its inception, and occupies a permanent seat on the Governing body.<sup>2</sup> During World War II, workers' delegates were nominated first by the Indian Federation of Labor and later by that organization and the All-India Trade-Union Congress (AITUC) alternately. In 1946 the AITUC was declared the most representative organization of Indian labor with the sole privilege of nominating delegates, but it lost this right in 1948 when the Indian National Trade-Union Congress (INTUC) was declared to have the larger membership. AITUC protests against this declara-

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1. Pakistan Times, (Lahmore), May 4, 1949.

2. So far, however, India has ratified only one-fifth of the ILO conventions. Indian Labour, (Delhi), July 1947.



tion and the ILO's request that the government attempt to obtain agreement on delegates<sup>1</sup> among Indian labor organizations resulted later in 1948 in both AITUC and INTUC being asked to send representatives to the Textile Committee of the ILO.<sup>2</sup>

The ILO has recently decided to set up in India a field office for Asia, which will concentrate on technical and vocational training schemes for the area.<sup>3</sup> The next general session of the ILO is scheduled to meet in India.

When the World Federation of Trade-Unions was organized in 1945, both the AITUC and the Indian Federation of Labor (IFL) became members. The AITUC continues to be a member, but the Socialist Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) which has absorbed the IFL has taken no steps toward affiliation with the WFTU and it is unlikely that it will do so in the future.

An executive committee meeting of the WFTU in May 1948 passed a resolution referring to India as one of the countries "in which trade-union rights have practically been abolished or seriously impeded."<sup>4</sup> Reference was also made to arrests of AITUC leaders, particularly S.A. Dange, president of the AITUC and a member of the executive committee of the WFTU, who was then in jail. The WFTU presented UNESCO with a report on trade-union suppression in India, and asked it to investigate the charges at the next session in Geneva.<sup>5</sup> The charges were refuted by India's representative at UNESCO.

When the split occurred in the WFTU in late 1948, leaving Communists in control, the AITUC criticized the withdrawing British and American members and declared January 9, 1949 as WFTU Day to

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1. Peoples Age (Bombay), July 18, 1948.
  2. Ibid., November 28, 1948.
  3. A-287, March 24, 1948, UNCLASSIFIED.
  4. Trade Union Record (Bombay), July 1948.
  5. Amrita Bazaar Patrika (Calcutta), June 16, 1948.



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rally Indian workers behind the WFTU. The AITUC will continue to participate in the WFTU, and will certainly, unless hindered by the government, take an active part in the conference of Asian labor representatives which the WFTU proposes to convene at Peiping sometime during late 1949.

Both the INTUC and the Hind Mazdoor Sabha participated in preliminary discussions held at Geneva in June 1949, preparatory to setting up a new anti-Communist world labor body.

The INTUC has taken the leadership in organizing an Asian Federation of Labor in pursuance of a plan drawn up at the ILO conference at San Francisco in June 1948. The main objectives of the Federation are: "to protect Asian countries against a return of foreign exploitation; to raise the living standards of Asian workers; to prevent Communist infiltration in labor unions; to make the voice of Asian workers heard at international conferences."<sup>2</sup> Burma, Pakistan, China, the Philippines, and Indonesia were invited to send delegates to a preliminary conference at Indore in May 1948, but few delegates were able to attend. A preparatory committee was set up, but the inauguration of the Federation was postponed. Asian delegates to the ILO conference at Geneva in June 1949 took a further step, declared the Federation formally constituted and converted the preparatory committee into a provisional executive committee with S.C. Bannerjee as president and Deven Sen as secretary. Of the thirteen delegates who voted in favor of this move, five were from the INTUC, two from Kuomintang China, one from Indonesia, three from Iran, and two from the Philippines. Delegates from Pakistan, Turkey, and Japan abstained from voting on the ground that they had no mandate from their organizations to do so. It was

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1. Trade Union Record (Bombay), December 1948.

2. Government of India Information Services, Washington, D.C., June 22, 1949.



decided that further proceedings be postponed until the next meeting of the Asian Regional Conference of the ILO at Ceylon in 1950; that workers' delegates from Asian countries to the ILO should be asked to nominate representatives to the meeting of the provisional executive committee; and that this committee be composed of two representatives from India, both to be members of the INTUC, and one from each of the other Asian countries.

Political considerations aside, the unsatisfactory state of trade unionism in most of the Asian countries, including India, would seem to justify the view of N.M. Joshi that the formation of the Asian Federation of Labor is premature.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, such an organization, if properly directed, might do much to assist the development along fruitful lines of stable and responsible trade-union movement and provide a counterbalance for Communist activities among the laboring populations. As proposed, it is a logical extension of the idea of an Asian Bloc in which India would play a leading role.

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1. D-126, New Delhi, February 7, 1949, CONFIDENTIAL.